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# THE AMATEUR TAXIDERMIST

## AMATEUR TAXIDERMISTRY.



AS an art, Taxidermy is strictly of modern inception. The Greek words which make the designation—meaning “arrangement,” and “skin”—express, collectively, its essential nature: the *arrangement* or manipulation of the skins of animals; practically, the removal and preservation of skins, which are either placed, unmounted, in cabinets, for examination and study; or subjected to the more complex arrangement of stuffing, mounting, and adjusting as near as possible to counterfeit nature's likeness, and to express the characteristic habits of the individual.

Taxidermy in America dates from about the year 1828. At this time an Englishman, named Scudder, established a museum in the City Hall Park, on Chambers Street, in New York, where the first work of this nature was done in this country.

The most successful American follower of this art, John G. Bell, is yet living. He was taught by Scudder, and was afterwards instrumental in the establishment of the Old Peale Museum. Mr. Bell was contemporary with Audubon and Wilson during the active labors of those naturalists, and accompanied the former in his notable field journeys in the Far West. The perfection to which Mr. Bell has brought his art is seen in the collection of humming-birds, the wild turkey, and many of the fine quadrupeds in the museum in Central Park.

Taxidermy calls for peculiar abilities. To be eminent in the art one must possess such faculties as will naturally place him higher. He must have the artistic faculty. It is not enough that he perform the simple mechanical manipulations: many such are known all over the land, and many such produce pleasing work; but there are higher possibilities.

Charles Waterton, the English naturalist, gave a potent impetus to the work. The late Jules Verreaux, of France, may be said to have shown in its widest sense its artistic capabilities. The latter has executed work that is fairly entitled to rank abreast with that of the higher plastic art. An eye for modelling is requisite for this attainment. After the skin is preserved, and ready for mounting, the more the operator is possessed of the faculty that makes the sculptor, the nearer he

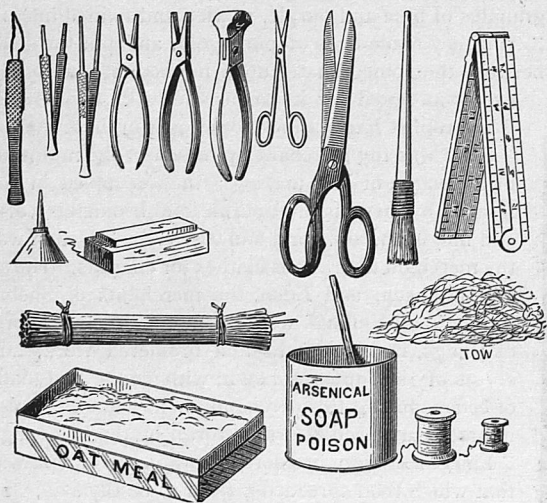


FIG. 2.

will succeed in modelling skins that express the characteristic habits of position. The best examples of Jules Verreaux are, fortunately, in our American Museum, in Central Park. The anatomical accuracy, as well as the artistic handling, of his work is well worthy of study by any who desire to excel in the art.

The details of the best work are considerable: the eyes are carefully made in glass, and the characteristic

shapes of pupils and canthi, and color of irides are shown.

Some of the most remarkable work with birds was sent several years since to the American Museum by the late Dr. Kaup, of Germany. The attitude of singing, mouth open and wings drooped, is seen to perfection.

Desirable as it is that this art should attain all that is possible in the artistic and æsthetic sense, yet it is quite within the reach of the *amateur* operator to become skilled in the various manipulations required, and an ordinary amount of mechanical ability will prove sufficient for very pleasing results.

Through the courtesy of Richard H. Holder, Esq., of the Illinois State Natural History Society, we have received a series of drawings of the methods of operating, which we will refer to in describing the processes.

Select a large bird or small quadruped for practice;

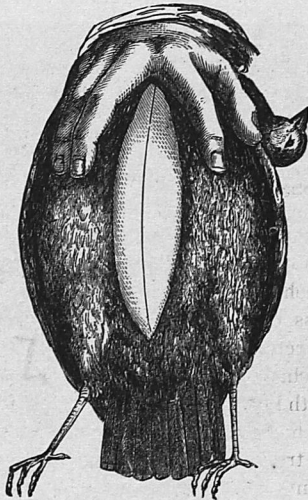


FIG. 3.

a hen, we will say. The few tools required are readily suggested, and easily procured. Any convenient knife, something after the shape of a paper-cutter or scalpel; a pair of stout, short-bladed shears; a lighter pair; forceps, which are exactly like those used by surgeons for dissecting, and a longer pair, with handles. The tools are shown in Fig. 2.

Having the bird in hand, we proceed to plug with cotton all holes made by shot, and the natural openings, to prevent blood or injecta from soiling the plumage.

In the field, when specimens are reserved for mounting, they should be placed in a cone of paper, head downward, as in the initial figure of this article, the tail being neatly covered by folding a portion over it. We now place the bird as in Fig. 5, and separate the feathers, when they are sparsely set, in a line with the breast-bone. Make an incision through the *skin only*; have at hand a dish of oatmeal or plaster of Paris to apply freely to grease or blood, that the feathers may not be soiled. The edges of the incision are apt to curl inwards; by treating them thoroughly with the meal they are protected from this evil.

The incision having been completed from the *lower end* of the breast-bone to the vent, careful manipulation with the forceps and fingers, and at times with the back of the knife, will suffice to remove the skin on both sides as low down as convenient. Place the thumb and fore-finger of your right hand over the skin of the breast, press downward, and you will expose the whole breast to the neck, as seen in Fig. 3. Now thrust a stout hook through the breast, beneath the “merry-thought,” or in any position to sustain a strong pull; suspend the hooked body from above, as you can then the more conveniently handle it. Now sever the neck, as seen in Figure 3. Lay hold of a wing, pushing down, at the same time opening a place under the wing by aid of your fingers, in which place your scissors, and cut off at the shoulder, as in Fig. 4.

Having cut off both wings, much care is requisite in separating the skin from the back. Here is the most delicate work; use great care as the loins are reached. Now take hold of a leg at the lower joint and press the

skin down carefully with the fingers; insert the scissors at the joint (the *knee*, properly), and sever as in Fig. 5.

Carefully force down the skin to the base of the tail and cut off; the oil sack and adhering flesh should be removed also. The legs may now be stripped of all flesh and fat—indeed, all fat should be carefully left on all parts of the body, so that the skin may be as free as possible from it. The wings may now be stripped, care being taken to use the fingers in forcing down the skin. Remove the flesh from the bones of the wings and legs. Do not separate the shafts of the feathers—which are now seen adhering to the bone. In large birds the wing may be conveniently opened from the outside; an incision made on the under side will allow room to remove the flesh.

Having now removed the body, and properly cleaned the wing and leg bones, we may very easily strip the skin down from the neck. Before doing this, introduce the hook into the severed end of the neck, and suspend the skin, head downward, from above. The skin will leave the neck very readily, but as soon as the skull is reached, manoeuvre carefully. Patient manipulating with the fingers will remove the skin from nearly all birds' heads. Owls and a few other birds require a slit made in the neck at this point, which may be sewed up before the skin is turned. The ear openings are first encountered; the membrane which covers them should be carefully pushed off the skull by the finger-nail, or a blunt stick; little cutting is required. Then the eyes: carefully push the skin away, until the eye-socket is completely exposed. The membrane which holds the skin in place around the eyes should be separated so skilfully as to leave the eyelids of the skin perfect in their borders. Push the skin farther down towards the bill, and then remove the eyes and all flesh that can be separated from the skull. Continue the skinning to the base of the bill. The under jaw should be denuded of its flesh; the tongue and all soft parts in this region removed. The base of the skull should now be cut through, removing a part of the roof of the mouth; the brain is now entirely removed, and all other soft parts.

The preserving process is now in order. Have a wide-mouthed bottle of *pure* arsenic, which should be plainly labelled POISON!—and kept securely stopped, and away from all other articles. With a common painter's “sash tool” or brush apply the dry arsenic freely to every fleshy part that can be reached. Begin

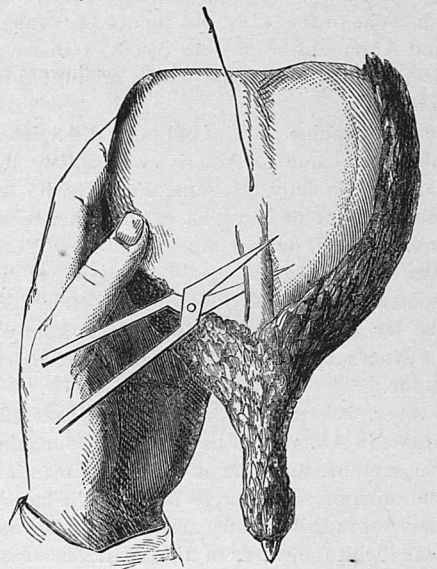


FIG. 4.

with the head. Apply the arsenic to the eye-sockets very freely, to the interior of skull, and then fill these parts with cotton. The mouth and jaws will require a thorough poisoning. Apply the poison freely to every other part, working it well into the wing portions and into the legs. Arsenic is not deleterious, used in a proper manner; it is deadly poison taken into the stomach. The worst that happens to those who use great quan-



ties; or handle it with abraded or cut hands is a slight soreness in the more tender parts, as under the nails; this is avoided very considerably by oiling the hands, or washing them in glycerine. The arsenical soaps are prized by some, but we much prefer the dry powder, as being more convenient and more efficient.

The legs of the bird and the bill should be varnished to preserve them from the attacks of insects.

The skin is now ready to turn into its proper shape, when the feathers must be smoothed into place, and if the skin is to be only used for examination or study, it may be filled out with cotton and arranged in the shape seen in Fig. 6. Before this is done the wing bones should be tied, on the inside, to each other, leaving a space between the ends of about an inch—or sufficient to allow the wings to assume a natural position. The leg bones should be wrapped with cotton. To make a neat cabinet specimen, like the Fig. 7, a piece of pine wood is wrapped with tow or cotton, and the upper end passed on to the skull; the lower end projects a little to allow the specimen to be handled without disturbing the plumage. The skin is now neatly brought into shape and sewed.

White feathers that are soiled may be cleansed by washing in soap and water, and repeatedly dried off by sprinkling with plaster of Paris.



FIG. 5.

To skin and preserve a quadruped the processes are so similar that any one having sufficient skill to do the one may successfully cope with the other. The "setting up" or mounting processes will be considered in another paper.

J. B. HOLDER.

### THE FLOWERS OF JUNE.

JUNE is a particularly rich month for flowers, especially rich in forms suggestive to the art student. The anemones, hepaticas, and violets with the earlier members of the lily family have gone, it is true, with the maples and horsechestnut, but their places are supplied by a host of lovely successors, so numerous in fact that we hardly know which to name. The roses, the cinquefoils, the thorns, the sorrels, the wild geraniums, the veronicas, the forget-me-nots, the painted-cup, the pyrolas and the pipsissewa, the American laurels and the swamp-honeysuckle, the tiny bluets, the woodbines, and on the mountains the delicate little twin-flower, and the insect-devouring sidesaddle flower, are but a few of the studies that are placed at our disposal, along with the showy orchis, and the yellow and the stemless lady's slippers, the blue-eyed grass, the star grass, the bold iris, and the wake-robin and the painted trillium, with the magnolia and the noble tulip tree. Nor have we to go far to find the greater part of the flowers named. Rambles around Inwood or Courtland Lake (between Riverdale and Williamsbridge), along the banks of the Bronx near Fordham, through the woods on Long Island or Staten Island, along the Palisades to Englewood, Tenafly, or Closter, over the Orange Mountains or around Perth Amboy,—anywhere and everywhere, will yield nearly all of them, and a trip to the Highlands or to the mountains of Pennsylvania would give the rest and many more.

### WILD FLOWERS, FERNS, AND GRASSES.

#### HOW TO PRESERVE THEM, ETC.

FADED, scentless, and dead! That which was once so fervid in color, so graceful in outline, so fragrant, so rich in life! And yet who is there amongst us who does not at times turn to such poor, treasured-up tokens of the past, and gather from them yet once again recollections which for a moment at least bear him away from the drier and drearier present? If there be such a one amongst my readers it is not for him I write. I write for him who loves to drop the conventionalities of business amidst the freedom of Nature, to forget sorrow and care, to free himself for a time from the chains of life-slavery, to lose his other self and find that better, truer being which luxuriates in the unalloyed enjoyment of natural beauties. With the poet, I care not if he never ask why such things be, if he know nothing of names, nor care what subordinate laws of evolution are exemplified in the grotesque mimicry of the Orchid or in the gorgeous coloring of that happy Oriole, or if he have never thought of the geologic task of the noisy brooklet, or of the age of yon rock, stained by the singular copartnership of algæ and fungi vulgarly yclept lichens; if he only love to drink in deep draughts of pure luxury as he lies beneath the arching foliage, revelling in the fragrance of the wild flowers and unconsciously sharing in the love-feelings so ardently sung by the Wood Thrush. This abandonment may be sensuous, but it is pure; it may be selfish, but it harms no other being; it may raise no prayer even in thought, yet its very existence is unboastful worship of the Beautiful and the True in the Universe. And after all to return—to return to the hot brick-lined streets, to the home barbarous by tradition, or hideous from fashion,—into rooms cramped and proportionless, plain to discomfort or richly furnished to misery, cold with a tomb-like whiteness or glaringly tawdry with paint and gilding, and to return without, one flower to renew the reveries in which but now he revelled! Why a single dead leaf, with but the scent of the moss and the mould on which he had dreamed, would be a keepsake of Nature's worth treasuring for its magic power of recalling those moments when he was not what every other day he must be.

And now, my good reader, with whom I am thus in sympathy, let us be off together for such a day of pleasure. But not too fast; even happiness of this kind is not to be attained in fulness without some labor, without some contrasts. Put these sheets of thick absorbent paper—or stay, if there are not enough add some sheets of newspaper cut to the same size (these will do as well for collecting purposes)—between these thin light boards, which are made, to prevent warping, of veneers, the one with the grain longitudinally, the other with the grain transversely. Now you have enough sheets for to-day, strap the boards tightly together (if not furnished with a special strap, an ordinary shawl-strap is all you require). This shall be your burden, and we are thus provided because nature is apt to be just a little selfish; she resents your efforts to transfer her beauties from their native spots; and some of the loveliest plants, especially ferns, are so delicate that they wilt almost as soon as broken off or even rooted up, whilst others are so sensitive that they fold their leaflets on the slightest touch. Thus if by and by when August comes you wish to preserve the Partridge Pea (*Cassia Chamæcristae*), in flower with its

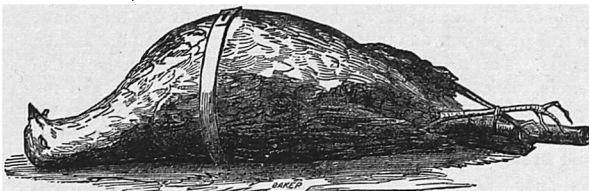


FIG. 7.

pretty mimosa-like leaves outspread, you will find it necessary to place them quickly between sheets of paper even before detaching them. My press takes sheets of paper eighteen by thirteen inches, thus taking plants that fit the sheets of my herbarium; though of course if you are not collecting in such a strictly scientific spirit you can have your press made to suit your fancy. For collecting only leaves, a much smaller press suffices.

As my burden, I will take a tightly closed tin-box

which will accommodate specimens of about the same size as those in the press. This box serves a double purpose: in the first place (and excuse such a gross idea) it will hold our lunch, at least for a time. Happiness, my dear sir, of even the most æsthetic kind cannot be obtained in perfection, under the most favorable circumstances, by either artist or enthusiast, if nutrition be in arrears. But our box!—in the second place we shall want to bring home some of our reminiscences as fresh as possible, and if we place our ferns and flowers in this box sprinkled with a few drops of fresh water, we shall find, if the box close tightly, that most kinds will keep even for several days fresh and fit for use.

As it is early June, let us leave the city by the ferry, cross the bay, and make our way by rail to the mouth of one of New Jersey's rivers. In a boat we skirt its banks, landing here and there to load ourselves with azaleas and sheep-laurels, plucking branchlets of various plants belonging to the heath family which tempt us by their tiny bell-like flowers. Ah! here are the magnolias lovely in cultivation, but before us proud in their independence; and see! that soft enticing bank of ferns, some yet tender and delicate, others al-

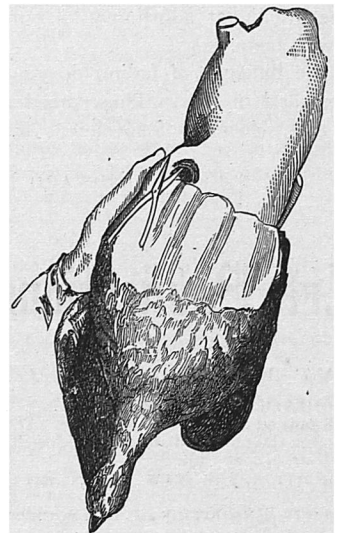


FIG. 8.

ready luxuriant with plume-like fertile fronds. Strolling inland, perhaps, we come upon a field glorious with a thick growth of the painted-cup, or chance upon tufts of pinks with here and there a lingering columbine,—now find ourselves entangled in a bed of briery wild roses, or sit down in ecstasies to study the beauties of a lady's-slipper, or thread our way cautiously by the side of the pond that offers us the first yellow pond-lilies. We scorn nothing; the veriest weed may by its leaves suggest some new design, and the hoary hudsonia on the brown sea-sands tells—but no! I am no artist; I can guide you to the flowers; perhaps some day you, sir, will reveal to us what they said to you. But stop! what with flowers and ferns, and drooping grasses, and quaint rushes, and tiny tufts of moss, and artistic lichens, and elfin-grown fungi, my box is filled and your press has become burdensome; in fact, we are overladen with spoil, but our hearts are as light as if we were not on the down-hill side of life and we turn merrily homewards.

Wherefore all this plunder? What are we going to do with all these flowers gay and sober, common and uncommon? What we may do with the rest we may consider hereafter, but as soon as we have time to spare we will set to work to preserve, by drying and pressing, those which we desire to keep beyond a few days. The work is simple enough and only requires patience. We have but to lay out each plant between layers of bibulous paper, carefully spreading the leaves and flowers as we see fit, but always being mindful to retain as much as possible the natural habit of the species. We place a few spare sheets between the sheets containing the successive plants (varying the number according to the character of the specimens, their succulency, thickness, etc.), until our pile reaches a moderate height. We then cover the heap with a board, on which we place a sufficient weight to secure effective compression, so that the leaves may be smoothly and evenly flattened. According to the old-fashioned method, the flowers should be changed every day to dry sheets until the drying process is complete; but a far less troublesome method is, after the plants have been thoroughly pressed for a day or so, to remove them into dry sheets, which are now placed in a press made either of wire-